

2009 Parents 10 BEST FAST-CASUAL RESTAURANTS

Così[®] was rated #1

5-Star Family Restaurants

These eateries have everything you want—healthy kids' food, quick service, and great prices. By Karen Cicero

You like to go out to eat. And you deserve to—after preparing practically every meal, it's nice to let someone else do the cooking now and then. But where to go? Sit-down restaurants can be pricey, fast-food places are pretty limited and not exactly known for healthy fare. An alternative: "fast-casual" restaurants—a hybrid of the two. You order at the counter and get your food quickly, but these places have a more varied menu, higher-quality ingredients, and comfier seating than typical fast-food joints. And they cost just a little more.

Parents surveyed 50 of these chains—places like Panera Bread, Chipotle, and Quiznos—to find out which ones rock when it comes to feeding families. We left no crumb unturned on the kids' menu, examining the calories, fat, and sodium of each dish. (We booted out any place that wouldn't fork over the info.) Then we grilled the restaurants about conveniences that are often must-haves for parents, like changing tables in the restrooms, booster seats for toddlers, or stuff for the kids to do if they finish their meal before you do. These chains came out on top for having at least three healthy kids' meals and a family-friendly atmosphere. And did we mention that the food is totally delish?

#1 **così**

Let your kid order without worries. Così is one of three restaurants in our survey where every kids' entrée—from the pizza to the PB & J—contains fewer than 425 calories. Even more remarkable, the sodium averages 432 milligrams, about half of what you'll typically find elsewhere. Why are kids' fave foods healthier here than at other chains? "We put our sandwiches and pizza on flatbread baked in the store, which keeps down the calories and sodium," explains Jill Lawrence, director of marketing. "There's a regular and a whole-grain version, and it's hard to tell the two apart."

The sides and drinks have a lot going for them too. Baby carrots, fresh fruit, or potato chips come with the kids' meal; even the chips are a decent pick because they're cooked in unsaturated oil. While soda is an option (as in every restaurant in the survey), a small apple-juice box or a cup of plain whole or skim milk are available too. The milk even comes with a straw that makes it taste like cookies and cream—and adds only 15 calories. With a "Lighten Up!" section on the adult menu, you'll have plenty of nutritious food to choose from too. *147 locations in 19 states, getcosi.com.*

RESTAURANT RATINGS

-  Changing Tables in Restrooms
-  Organic Milk Available
-  Activity Sheet and Crayons
-  Nutrition Info Online